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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6588
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C O N F I D E N T I A L ASUNCION 000079

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/30/2028
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PA](#)
SUBJECT: THREATS TO DISQUALIFY LUGO

REF: A. ASUNCION 894

[1](#)B. ASUNCION 722

Classified By: DCM Michael J. Fitzpatrick; reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (U) The Colorado Party's focus -- and with it the media spotlight -- has shifted from its disputed primary elections to confronting presidential hopeful and resigned Catholic bishop Fernando Lugo following the January 20 announcement that presidential candidate Blanca Ovelar had been declared the winner of the Colorado primary. A flurry of news stories January 24 and 25 reported the Colorados may challenge Lugo's presidential candidacy on the grounds that the Church has not recognized his December 2006 resignation as bishop of San Pedro Department (reftels A and B). Colorado vice presidential candidate Carlos Maria Santacruz told the press January 26 that the Church's ongoing refusal to sanction Lugo's unilateral defrocking nullifies his eligibility to run for president because the constitution prohibits "ministers of any religion" from seeking the presidency. However, President Nicanor Duarte Frutos and close ally Senator Juan Carlos Galaverna -- leaders of Ovelar's "oficialista" Colorado faction -- denied January 26 and 28 that the Colorados would challenge Lugo's candidacy.

[1](#)2. (SBU) The Church's unwillingness to legally separate Lugo from the clergy leaves him vulnerable to assaults on his political bonafides as well as to a legal challenge by the Colorados. While the Church has avoided commenting on Lugo's status -- the title of bishop, unless excommunicated, is a lifetime commitment by canonical law -- some clergy members have fueled opposition to Lugo's candidacy by publicly criticizing him. Alto Parana Bishop Rogelio Livieres Plano told the press January 27 that Lugo was "a dagger thrust into the body of the Church."

[1](#)3. (C) COMMENT: While Lugo held a 45% to 22% lead over Ovelar in a December 2007 public opinion poll, current speculation suggests that Ovelar has nearly closed that gap. Despite repeated threats to take legal action to disqualify him, the Colorados can only now challenge Lugo since he formally registered his candidacy on February 1. Colorado comments about his legal ability to run have served as test balloons to gauge public opinion on Lugo's eligibility. Initial public reaction reveals that a challenge to Lugo's candidacy would be met with social protests organized by his supporters. Colorado insiders told PolOff January 30 that opposition groups based in San Pedro had threatened to launch widespread road blockades and foment large-scale protests in Asuncion if the Colorados move to impugn Lugo. While Lugo's candidacy could still be challenged before the February 6 deadline, many political analysts believe the threats are idle, since the Colorados stand to benefit if the opposition vote is split amongst three candidates. END COMMENT.

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